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## OPINION EXCLUSIVE

*What is the essence of sanctions? Why did the West impose sanctions upon Iran, and why did the Iranian academic community fail to engage with this phenomenon in a proper manner, simultaneously proving unable to produce the requisite logical and scientific discourse about it? The absence of a profound engagement with the question of sanctions has engendered, and continues to engender, unfavorable consequences and damages, of which the atrophy of national self-consciousness represents the most considerable.*

*The normalization of this condition further conduces to a certain lethargy, an absence of effective action, and ultimately, capitulation before it. Consequently, until, on the one hand, the essence of this phenomenon, its historical roots, and its theoretical foundations are elucidated, and, on the other hand, until comprehensive and meticulous social scientific investigations are undertaken concerning it, one cannot correctly appraise its consequences nor effectively combat it.*

*The comprehension of modern phenomena and concepts within the domain of human sciences and relations is attainable through diverse methods; concepts such as liberty, welfare, rationality, development, justice, and others may, at times, be examined via the Socratic dialectical method, at times their semantic evolution throughout history may be revisited, or they may be analyzed from the perspective of moral philosophy with respect to their individual and social consequences, and at times, through a sociological lens and a bottom-up perspective, the conditions for the emergence of these phenomena may be scrutinized.*

*One of the captivating methods for analyzing ideas and concepts consists of investigating the transformation of their meanings within the historical context and revisiting the connections and relations between old and new significations; a method prevalent in 19th- and 20th-century Germany and employed in the works of thinkers such as Max Scheler, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Carl Schmitt. The phenomenon of sanctions also ranks among those modern concepts that occupy a determinative position within the contemporary international legal and political order, and through the aforementioned method, one may, on the one hand, descend into the depths of its theological foundations, and, on the other hand, utilizing sociological research methods, examine its impact upon the diverse classes and guilds of the target society.*

*Research concerning the theology of sanctions can furthermore furnish a framework for comprehending global politics, its instruments — such as economic punishment — and its objectives. Nevertheless, as an initial step, it appears that one can only employ these models in a formal manner for the theological and historical analysis of the concept of sanctions; for, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no comparable research before regarding "sanctions" is worthy of mention, and to surmount this methodological underdevelopment, in addition to the framework of social analysis and critique of the Iranian academic research system, an attempt shall be made to elucidate the pattern of the West's adversarial conduct against Iran by utilizing genealogical and analytical frameworks derived from thinkers such as Nietzsche, Schmitt, Foucault, and, briefly, Agamben.*

# Theology of sanctions



● RICHARD ASH/IWM

In sacred scriptures and the language of divine religions, sanctions possess diverse meanings and synonyms, having experienced varied applications across different contexts.

Within Christian theology, the concept of "Anathema" — signifying curse, excommunication, and ostracism — may be regarded as an instrument for preserving faith and the Church's power, of which "sanctions" — according to the models that shall be enumerated — are the subsequent and secularized form within the modern moral and political order.

The Old Testament, likewise, owing to the absolute dominance of the discourse of Christian law, is replete with curses, prohibitions, excommunications, and all kinds of punishments and their promises. For example, one may refer to the "Book of Genesis" and the curse of Ham (son of the Prophet Noah), or to the "Book of Deuteronomy," wherein, according to the testament of Moses (PBUH), six tribes of the descendants of Jacob (PBUH) are to bless the people, while the other six tribes are to direct curses toward the future idolaters and infidels of the community: "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place." And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.' Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother... Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor's boundary stone... Cursed is anyone who leads the blind astray on the road... Cursed is anyone who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person. And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.'" (Deuteronomy 27: 15–25)

With this description, according to the frameworks that shall be mentioned, the

decree of these prohibitions will also extend to the modern era, and sanctions represent the continuation of the theology of punishment and one of its subsequent forms, which the modern state imposes upon "adversarial" states.

## Schmitt and the theology of 'friend/enemy'

Carl Schmitt does not explicitly address the subject of sanctions in his works; however, through a reconstruction of his argumentation and chosen method, one can deduce sanctions as one of the forms of modern "punishment". The cornerstone of Schmitt's analysis is the proposition he advances in his book *Political Theology*: "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts." According to this framework, punishment, like the concept of "sovereignty" and many new legal and political expressions, is a secularized theological concept.

On this basis, the sovereign, in the capacity of a secularized god, holds the monopoly over "Gericht" (German for judgment), and this judgment culminates in the "state of exception," which is the secular equivalent of the "miracle"; in other words, just as God suspends the cosmic order during miracles to guarantee the salvation of humanity, the modern sovereign likewise suspends positive laws to rescue the terrestrial order. "Schuld" (German for guilt) is not merely a transgression of a legal norm but is rooted in the "original sin," which constitutes the innate condition of humankind.

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● EVA BEE/THE GUARDIAN

thority in the modern state, one must look to the metaphysical structure that this state has superseded — namely, monotheistic theology. He endeavors to demonstrate that modern politics still acquires meaning within a theological structure.

Another point that ought not to escape attention is the fundamental distinction between "friend" and "enemy," which directly pertains to the discussion of sanctions. In his book *The Concept of the Political*, he identifies the inception of politics as the moment when the enemy is determined and defined. Sanctions constitute the contemporary consequence of this distinction: a declaration of enmity without a declaration of war. In this logic, sanctions represent the ritualistic act of excluding the enemy from the sacred community of law.

In Schmitt's philosophy, political power is inherently theological, for the concept of "exception" — which sanctions here represent — still derives sustenance from a miracle-centered theology. The theology of sanctions in a Schmittian reading signifies the return of God in the guise of the international sovereign: God/State, which can at any moment suspend the rules in order to execute its own justice.

Another point concerning international sanctions from Schmitt's standpoint is that, in *The Concept of the Political*, he enumerates four "central domains" that, from the 16th through the 20th centuries, have dominated the spiritual life of the European human: first, the theological domain; second, the metaphysical domain; third, the humanitarian-moral domain; and finally, the economic domain. Rejecting the cliché of the pacifistic nature of economic discourse, he maintains that, in the current situation, an imperialism founded upon pure economic power will naturally endeavor to preserve conditions in the world that enable it to employ its economic instruments without interference from others; instruments such as the repudiation of credits, sanctions on raw materials, and the destruction of others' currency, et cetera.

In the central economic domain, for the application of such instruments, a new and intrinsically pacific vocabulary is created; war is condemned, but executions, sanctions, punitive expeditions, pacifications, protection of treaties, international police, and measures for the preservation of peace remain. For this reason, the "adversary" is no longer [merely] designated as "enemy," but rather defined as a disturber of peace and therefore a "hors-la-loi" (French for outlaw) and "hors l'humanité" (French for outside humanity), and the war waged for the purpose of protecting and expanding economic power must, with the aid of propaganda, be transformed into a crusade and the final battle of humanity! Consequently, from Schmitt's perspective, international sanctions are an instrument of domination for the economic discourse, through which the adversarial power that has targeted this central domain is punished.

## Theology of servitude and the ethics of sanctions

One of the principal perspectives in the critique and examination of sanctions is the horizon of moral philosophy. Sanctions may be analyzed, both in terms of their essence and their consequences, from an evaluative standpoint. Anglo-Saxon and analytic moral philosophies predominantly critique and analyze sanctions from the angle of consequence-assessment and their effects, whereas the methodological principles of the Continental tradition necessitate a revisiting of their historical nature and genealogical semantic trajectory. Friedrich Nietzsche ranks among the